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cahokia MOUNDS

World Heritage Site · Collinsville, Illinois



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World Heritage Site
Collinsville, Illinois



In recent years Cahokia Mounds has evolved from a State Park to a designated State Historic Site and World Heritage Site. Over the years the site has changed from a camping, picnic and playground facility to one which preserves a valuable international cultural resource. The Cahokia Mounds Historic Site and the Museum Society offer a wide range of educational programs and publications — Arrangements for lecturers, traveling exhibits, guided or self-guided tours. Individuals as well as civic, fraternal and educational groups can marvel at the reconstructed typical Indian dwellings, a slide show in the museum or over 30 exhibits on the culture and artifacts of the Cahokians. The Museum Society also operates a gift & book shop. Cahokia Mounds Historic Site is located across the Mississippi River, just minutes from the Gateway Arch in downtown St. Louis. I-55/70 leads to the Hospitality District of Southwestern Illinois, Exit 11 at Highway 157 south to U.S. Route 40 west to Cahokia Mounds World Heritage Site, and the beginning of an adventure into one of mankind's most interesting stories.

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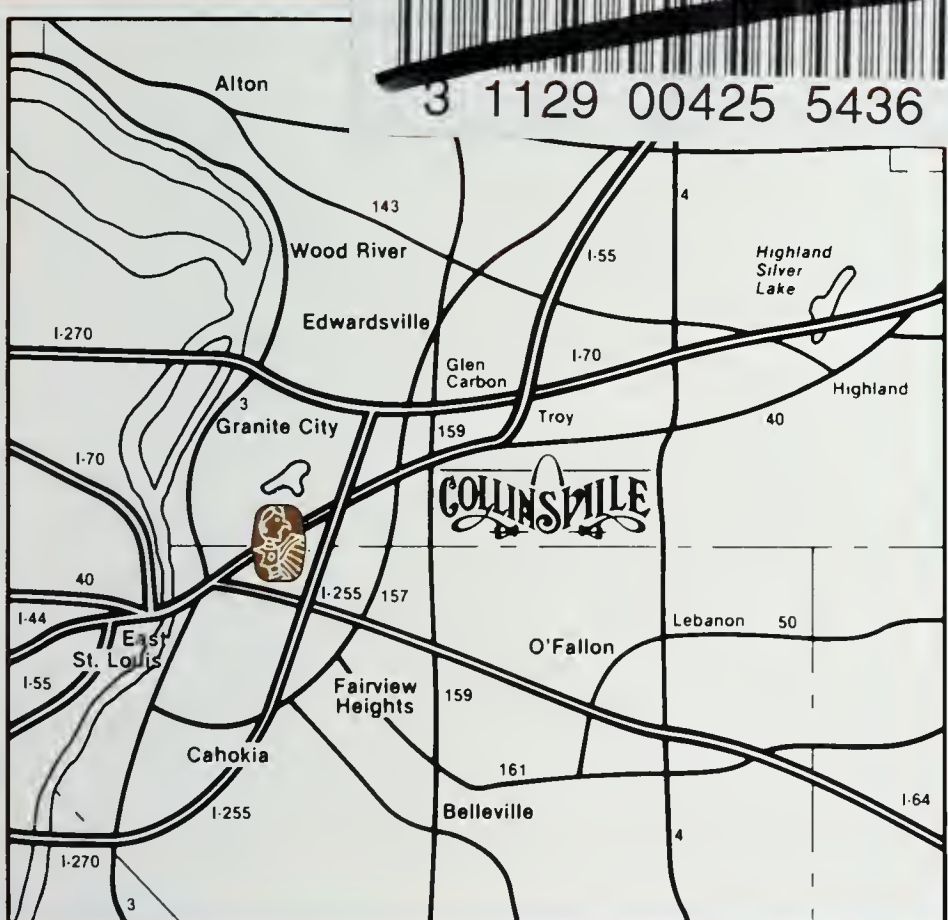
In ceremonies on December 14, 1982, Cahokia Mounds was officially designated as a World Heritage Site. This designation recognizes and protects irreplaceable properties of outstanding international significance. Through the World Heritage Convention of 1972 the nations of the world defined mankind's cultural and natural heritage and established a system of recognition and preservation for the world's common heritage.

Cahokia Mounds as a cultural addition to the World Heritage List met at least one of the programs criteria of unique artistic achievement, exceptional testament to a vanished civilization or a place associated with events or ideas of universal significance.

Other World Heritage Sites in the U.S. include:

Everglades Nat'l. Park
Grand Canyon Nat'l Park
Great Smoky Mountains
National Park
Independence Hall
Mammoth Cave
National Park

Mesa Verde Nat'l Park
Olympic National Park
Redwood National Park
Wrangell-St. Elias
National Park
Yellowstone Nat'l. Park



In Collinsville, Illinois, across the river from St. Louis, Missouri, where the Gateway Arch now stands, a highly sophisticated, pre-Columbian society developed, flourished and vanished. Only recently have archaeologists been able to piece together a comprehensive, coherent account of the sophisticated culture whose central city covered more than six and a half square miles and whose population approached as many as 40,000 people. Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site & World Heritage Site is located in the heartland of the American Midwest; on the Illinois bank of the Mississippi River within a 175 square mile area known as the American Bottom, the largest floodplain of the upper Mississippi River. This location, at the hub of the inland rivers, allowed its ancient leaders to control an enormous trade network.

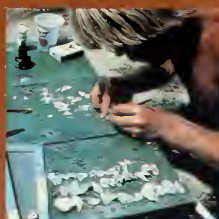


The dominant features at Cahokia are the mounds themselves. Originally approximately 120 earthen mounds are believed to have existed at the site. Today 65 remain intact, with 60 mounds being preserved within the historic site. Most of the mounds were ceremonial. The great platform mound at Cahokia, called Monks Mound, is the largest prehistoric mound north of Mexico and the largest prehistoric earthen construction in the New World. Although the mounds are the most dramatic feature at Cahokia, they are not the only features with a story to tell. Associated with the mounds are the borrow pits, plazas, sun circles — called the American Woodhenge, stockade, and countless houses, each of which adds to the pool of information and helps to form a more complete picture of the people at Cahokia.



cahokia MOUNDS

The interpretive center of Cahokia Mounds World Heritage Site offers dozens of exciting exhibits, displays and the soon-to-be constructed new museum will provide visitors with one of the nations most dramatic and complete stories of native American life. Popular annual programs at Cahokia Mounds are Kids Day held in May, Rediscover Cahokia held in mid-August and the Archaeological Field School program. These events and others held throughout the year include instruction in and demonstrations of Indian dancing, food preparation, pottery making, flint knapping, basket weaving and archery. Additional activities include tours, craft classes, films, exhibits and many "hands-on" programs are regularly scheduled.



The Archaeological Field School program attracts non-professional archaeologists nationwide. The program is designed to stimulate a greater appreciation for archaeology. Activities focus on basic techniques, excavations, surveying, mapping and artifact processing.

Although the mounds are the most dramatic and dominant characteristics at Cahokia, few of them functioned as burial sites, the majority were rectangular flat-topped ceremonial mounds which supported temples, other religious buildings and residences for the elite. Most residents were buried in common cemeteries but individuals of high status were often buried in conical or ridgetop mounds and were sometimes accompanied by sacrificial victims. Mound 72 is a prime example of the latter. Excavations of a portion of this small ridgetop mound revealed more than 300 burials, the majority in mass graves. Large pits were found each containing from 19 to 53 young women. Nearby was unearthed a most unusual burial of four men with their heads and hands removed. The most intriguing burial in Mound 72 was a tall male about 40 years old, probably an early leader, laid on a blanket of 20,000 marine shell beads. He was surrounded by sacrificial retainers and piles of grave offerings including Smoky Mountain mica, Lake Superior copper, beads made from Gulf Coast shells, chunky game stones and over 800 perfect arrowheads.

One of the most fascinating discoveries was a sun calendar, now designated "Woodhenge." This structure now reconstructed, was a circle 410 feet in diameter composed of 48 red cedar posts and a large central observation post. Precise sunrise alignments have been determined for the Spring and Fall Equinoxes and the Winter and Summer Solstices. Undoubtedly other observations and calculations were made from this structure to determine important dates and festivals.

Another fascinating feature of this ancient complex was the Stockade. A two mile long, log wall constructed to protect the central, more sacred portion of the community. Warriors could defend the city in towers placed at intervals around the wall. The exact reasons for the construction of the Stockade are unknown. The facilities are OPEN DAILY 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. except on major holidays.



The New Museum and Interpretive Center scheduled to open by mid-1988 will utilize state-of-the-art design concepts and technology to present one of the most complete and interesting stories of a vanished Native American Civilization, one whose achievements were so significant that it ranks among the Greats of the Ancient World.

Visitors approaching the new 33,000 sq. ft. Museum will experience displays of actual on site excavations. Once inside the Museum, the lobby serves as a centralized orientation area, and the story of Cahokia Mounds begins to unfold. Exhibits interpreting the Cahokian Culture focus on the central theme of "Cahokia An Urban Center". A theatre presentation, panoramic views of the site, hands-on displays, large scale model of the sites features, lectures, demonstrations and gift shop all combine to give the visitor a more complete and enjoyable learning experience at Cahokia Mounds World Heritage Site.



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